

POINT CABRILLO LIGHT STATION
(Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park)
13800 Point Cabrillo Drive
Mendocino
Mendocino County
California

HALS CA-54
CA-54

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

POINT CABRILLO LIGHT STATION (Point Cabrillo Lighthouse)

HALS NO. CA-54

- Location:** Point Cabrillo Light Station aka Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park, or Point Cabrillo Light House and Fog Signal Building, 13800 Point Cabrillo Drive, Mendocino, CA 95460, (707) 937-5804.
Coordinates: dd Latitude: 39.20.965, dd longitude: -123.48.801
- Significance:** Point Cabrillo Light Station is one of the most complete light stations in the United States currently retaining twelve of the original fifteen buildings and structures. Historically it is significant because of its association with the development of California in that it made it safer to ship people, supplies and building materials up and down the coastline.
- Description:** The Lighthouse station is located on Lighthouse road one half mile beyond Point Cabrillo Drive. The station consists of 12 of the original 15 buildings and structures, pedestrian and vehicular paving, fencing and windscreen planting. In addition to the lighthouse there are three historic lighthouse keeper residences one each for the head keeper, and first and second assistant keepers.

The First Assistant Lightkeeper's home is now a museum that depicts what the home looked like in 1935 and is furnished with objects that would have been in use by the family at that time. A ramp for access has been added to the rear of the home and that is used as the entry to the museum. This leaves the appearance of the front of the home historically correct. The Lightkeeper's home is used as a Bed and Breakfast. The Second Assistant Lightkeeper's Home is awaiting funding for restoration by volunteers. All of the homes and the other buildings associated with the station are painted the official US Lighthouse Service colors of the period. All have red roofs and either unpainted wood shingle siding or creamy-white lapped siding.

Each home has a detached garage one of which has been converted to a public accessible restroom. There are two other utility buildings and a water tank associated with the residential area of the site. A low, wooden picket fence painted white runs parallel to a narrow, concrete walk in front of the three homes. The walk leads out to the lighthouse and parallels a gravel drive that encircles the lighthouse. Monterey Cypress are planted on the North, East and West sides of this complex of buildings for wind protection. On the East side there is a row of 7 mature Cypress – the most northerly tree in the row is approximately 30' tall and each tree in the row steps up in height ending in a tree approximately 60' in height – this gradation resulting from intense wind off the ocean.

The space between the buildings is in lawn except for narrow beds of foundation plants around each of the residences. There are also two raised vegetable beds that are part of the interpretive program. A 6' lattice fence has been added to screen the rear yards of the residences that does not appear to be original.

The lighthouse lies approximately 200 feet beyond the furthest house and between it and the house there are two other utilitarian structures. The blacksmith shop is a small wood structure similar to the other buildings in the complex. The oil house is an all concrete structure including a concrete roof. It has a metal door with large, wrought iron, black hinges. This building currently houses communication equipment.

The lighthouse stands alone on the portion of land that projects furthest out into the Pacific just south of Frolic Cove so named as the site where "The Frolic" brig crashed in 1850 before the Cabrillo Light Station was built. There are no structures, fences or plantings near the lighthouse that could obstruct views. Only grasses, California Poppy and Blue-eyed grass grow around this isolated, rather demur structure.

History: The need for a lightstation at Point Cabrillo was exemplified by the wreck of the Frolic – a two masted clipper brig that struck the reef off Point Cabrillo in 1850 while carrying cargo bound for miners engaged in the California Gold Rush. For years schooners shipping lumber from Mendocino County had wrecked en route to San Francisco. When, after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, the demand for wood to rebuild the city was so great, the plan to build a lighthouse at Point Cabrillo was officially approved two months after the quake on June 20, 1906. Construction was completed in August 1908.

The 30-acre property for the lightstation was purchased from rancher David Gordon. The Lingren Company was selected to build the lighthouse and fog Signal Building, three light house keeper's houses, and a barn.

The original light station included all of the buildings there today plus a pump house, a water tower and a barn which was burned by the local fire district as a training exercise.

Originally the station was managed by the U.S. Lighthouse Service. Then U.S. Coast Guard managed the light station from 1939 until 1991.

In 1988, the California Coastal Conservancy began the process of preserving the light station buildings. Carey and Company, architects were hired to do a historic structures report and plans for preservation. Bill Hole, Professor of Historic Preservation/Restoration at the College of the Redwoods, Eureka,

California was the preservation consultant and Anthony Scramaglia, Scramaglia Construction, Fort Bragg, California was the general contractor for the preservation project.

The Point Cabrillo Light Keeper Association manages the property. In 2002 State Parks accepted the site, which is now a State Historic Park.

Sources: Interpretive brochure: Point Cabrillo Light Keepers Association, P.O. Box 641, Mendocino, CA 95460, (707) 937-6122.

“Point Cabrillo” by Bruce Rogerson, Ginny Rorby, and Jim Kimbrell, Mendocino Historical Review, Vol. XXIII, Spring 2009, published by Kelley House Museum, Inc., P.O. Box 922, Mendocino CA 95460, www.KelleyHouseMuseum.org.

Point Cabrillo Light Station History, www.pointcabrillo.org/history.htm

Visit to the site, May 2009.

Historian: Chris Pattillo, Landscape Architect, PGAdesign, 444 17th Street, Oakland, CA, 94612, pattillo@PGAdesign.com. May 29, 2010



View of the lighthouse taken from the southwest showing the gravel drive that encircles the building. Behind it is the blacksmiths building. In the background two of the three lightkeeper's residences can be seen as can the white picket fence, the cypress windscreen, and the row of mature Monterey Cypress that rise in height left to right (Chris Pattillo, May 2009).



View looking west showing the gravel drive and parallel concrete path leading to the lighthouse on the left and the blacksmith shop on the right with the Oil House seen behind the blacksmith shop (white building) (Chris Pattillo, May 2009).